

**CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE HABITAT RELATIONSHIPS SYSTEM**  
**maintained by the**  
**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**  
**and supported by the**  
**CALIFORNIA INTERAGENCY WILDLIFE TASK GROUP**  
**Database Version 8.1 (2005)**

---

B773 American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*  
Family: Emberizidae Order: Passeriformes Class: Aves

Written by: T. Kucera

#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, SEASONALITY

Rare breeder in coastal counties, but mostly on the coastal slope of Humboldt and Del Norte counties; breeding in Marin County possible (Shuford 1993, Small 1994). First confirmed breeding of the American redstart in California was in 1972 near Arcata, Humboldt County (Binford and Stallcup 1972). Rare fall migrant along the entire coast and offshore islands. Rare but regular migrant along eastern Sierra Nevada. Unusual but regular migrant and winter visitor in the eastern deserts and the Imperial Valley (Small 1994). Neotropical migrant; most individuals winter in Central and South America and in the Caribbean.

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Foliage gleaner. Eats insects, wasps, moths and their larvae, and spiders, may chase them from foliage (Bent 1953, Erlich et al. 1988, Sherry 1979). Eats seed and berries rarely.

Cover: Little information specific to California. Based on other areas in western North America, during breeding, American redstarts inhabit valley foothill and montane riparian, redwood, and Douglas-fir habitats (Small 1994, Sherry and Holmes 1997). During migration, they inhabit a variety of shrubby and wooded habitats, including redwood, Douglas-fir, valley foothill and montane riparian, montane hardwood-conifer, and urban.

Reproduction: Predominantly monogamous; builds nest in fork of a low tree; may use old or deserted nest of other species (Sherry and Holmes 1997).

Water: No information.

Pattern: Transient in a wide variety of lowland habitats.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Neotropical migrant. Winters from northern Baja California to Caribbean and South America, and in coastal central and southern California and near the Salton Sea and lower Colorado River Valley (Sherry and Holmes 1997). Spring and fall migrant in the eastern Sierra Nevada and Mono Basin (Small 1994).

Home Range: No information found.

Territory: Territorial in both summer and winter. Breeding territories are defended by both sexes, and can range from 0.1 ha to several hectares. Average sizes of breeding territories in Quebec averaged 0.4-0.6 ha (Sherry and Holmes 1977). Winter territory held by lone individuals of both sexes; average size about the same as that in summer (Holmes et al. 1989).

Reproduction: Predominantly monogamous, but facultatively polygynous. In New Hampshire, 5-30% of males were polygynous, establishing a second territory after the primary female had begun incubation (Omland and Sherry 1995).

Niche: Preyed upon by sharp-shinned hawks, ravens, and other common nest predators, and is parasitized by brown-headed cowbirds (Sherry and Holmes 1997).

## REFERENCES

- Bent, A. C. 1953. Life histories of American wood warblers. U.S. National Museum Bull. 203. 743pp.
- Binford, L. C. and R. W. Stallcup. 1972. American redstart breeding in California. *California Birds* 3:87-90.
- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. *The birder's handbook*. Simon and Schuster, New York. 785pp.
- Holmes, R. T., T. W. Sherry, and L. R. Reitsma. 1989. Population structure, territoriality, and overwinter survival of two migrant warbler species in Jamaica. *Condor* 91:545-561.
- Omland, K. E. and Sherry, T. W. 1995. Parental care not likely to explain poor mating success in yearling male American redstarts. *Condor* 97:836-837.
- Sherry, T. W. 1979. Comparative interactions and adaptive strategies of American redstarts and least flycatchers in a northern hardwoods forest. *Auk* 96:265-283.
- Sherry, T. W. and R. T. Holmes. American redstart. *The Birds of North America* 277:1-31.
- Shuford, W. D. 1993. *The Marin County breeding bird atlas*. Bushtit Books, Bolinas, CA. 479pp.
- Small, A. 1994. *California birds: their status and distribution*. Ibis Publishing Co., Vista, CA.